



EPISODE 2x11:
"Lilac"

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Plot, scenes & text from the Shooting Script, and Original Draft of the
"Serenity" Motion Picture by Joss Whedon

WARNING: *This episode contains graphic scenes with violence that may offend some.*

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Teaser

INT. SERENITY - KAYLEE'S BUNK

All is quiet.

KAYLEE lies on her back, snuggled in her sheets, sleeping until—

KAYLEE
(suddenly jumps up)
YeahBuWha—?!?

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. SERENITY – JAYNE'S BUNK

JAYNE jumps up with a loud snort, immediately reaching for his guns. He grabs one, swings it towards the camera.

JAYNE
What the—

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. SERENITY – ZOE AND WASH'S BUNK

WASH's eyes blink rapidly. He awakens, staring, confused, into the camera.

WASH
(dazed)
Five more minutes, honey...

He shifts onto his side, putting his pillow over his head.

Then he sits up quickly, throwing back the pillow, looking into the camera again.

WASH (cont'd)
Waitamminute, you're not—

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. SERENITY – SIMON'S ROOM

EXTREME CLOSE UP: RIVER swoops into frame, grinning widely.

RIVER
(top of her lungs)
MORNING!

River smiles at SIMON as he looks around wildly.

SIMON
(disoriented)
Huh? River!? Wha-

RIVER
(matter-of-fact)
You were having a nightmare, Simon. You should thank me.

SIMON
(still disoriented)
Thank you?

RIVER
Always a pleasure.

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. SERENITY – MAL’S BUNK

River carefully climbs the ladder down into Mal’s bunk. She crosses the room and stands over him for a moment. Then –

RIVER
(top of her lungs)
MORNING!

MAL
Bwah!

MAL is startled awake and falls out of the bed, onto the floor with a thud.

RIVER
Whoops. Chaos theory. That wasn’t part of the plan.

MAL
(face down)
Mean to say there was a plan in there?

Mal sits up, rubs his eyes. Realizes he’s less than covered by the blanket, and whips it back around his waist.

MAL (cont'd)

How... exactly did you get in here, you mind my asking?

RIVER

("obviously")

The door.

MAL

Ah. You are getting WAY too at home around here.

(beat)

And the previously mentioned plan was?

RIVER

You wanted to talk to me. I'm here.

MAL

I wanted...?

RIVER

(impatient)

About the JOB... We're going for a ride.

MAL

Oh! Right. Well, yes as a matter-o-fact I did. And the fact you already knew that is exactly the 'why' I wanted to speak to you on.

RIVER

I'll be ready soon. Need my goggles first. Spent all night looking. Eyewear is very important.

("aha")

But YOU know where they are!

Mal raises an eyebrow.

MAL

All night? Why aren't you—

RIVER

During sleep the brain shuts down. Brainwaves dissipate as one's awareness of the external goes away. Dreams begin. Rapid eye movement begins. Muscle paralysis sets in. The brain wakes up, but it doesn't tell the body its secret. Doesn't want the dead weight.

(beat)

Sleep is traumatic.

She starts to leave, then turns around.

RIVER (cont'd)
Simon won't be happy.

MAL
You let me worry on that.

River nods.

RIVER
We can talk strategy later.

She turns and leaves. Mal promptly flops back onto his bed, and closes his eyes.

EXT. SPACE

Serenity smoothly approaches a dusty orange MOON.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE

ZOE sits in the co-pilot's chair, staring out into space at the approaching moon.

She's startled when River runs in, yanks open a locker near the door, and pulls out a pair of GOGGLES. Promptly puts them on her head.

RIVER
(off Zoe's look)
Eyewear is very important.

INT. SERENITY – FOREDECK HALLWAY – LATER

Mal – his hair a mess, half his shirt buttons not done, said shirt untucked - climbs out of his bunk, almost tumbling into Zoe – who is leaving the bridge – as Serenity gives a violent JERK.

ZOE
Good morning, sir.

MAL
Good?
(beat)
Got a tingly feelin' says that rockin' ain't good.

ZOE
Wake up on the wrong side of the bed, didja?

MAL
Could say that.

They exit the hallway into:

INT. SERENITY – DINING ROOM – CONTINUOUS

Walk and talk.

ZOE
It's nothing to worry on. Wash will have it sorted out—

Serenity jerks again, sending both crashing forward.

MAL
I hope the word you were lookin' for there was "soon."

Another large jolt. Leftover food flies off the table.

MAL (cont'd)
Mule prepped?

ZOE
Nearly. Thought I'd spend my last moments with my husband.

MAL
Don't distract him.

They continue to the AFT HALLWAY and down the stairs to the:

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY - CONTINUOUS

UPPER CATWALK.

ZOE
Wasn't planning on making out, sir.

The voices of an argument below ring through the cargo bay as Mal and Zoe look down. KAYLEE, SIMON, and JAYNE circle each other. Jayne has Simon's arm twisted behind his back.

KAYLEE
Jayne! Let him go!

JAYNE
I will when I wanna.

SIMON
I know that could take time, considering how long it takes
your <ape-like> brain to process... anything, but could
you hurry, please? I think my fingers are losing feeling...

Simon gasps as Jayne start squeezing his arm even tighter.

JAYNE
I don't much like your tone there, doctor.

ANGLE ON: Upper catwalk

Mal sees the scrap below, rolls his eyes. He's about to say something to Zoe when
the ship jerks. Again.

MAL
Tell our love-sick mechanic that a doctor broken by Jayne
is better than a dead doc skewered by flyin' engine parts.

Mal turns around – back up the stairs. Zoe turns to say something, but Mal is
already walking away, his back to her. She follows him with her eyes as he
disappears from sight.

ANGLE ON: Cargo bay floor

JAYNE (cont'd)
Now, let's hear that apology.

SIMON
Apology!? For WHAT!?

JAYNE
Don't much take to being woken up by a living alarm
clock staring me down. Nutball-salad ain't the best way to
start my day.

Jayne twists Simon's arm until he is on the floor, wincing in tight-lipped pain.

ZOE (OS)
(bored, seen it all before)
Don't make me shoot you, Jayne. Let him loose.

Zoe walks down the stairs.

Jayne reluctantly lets Simon go, takes a half-step away like he doesn't care.

JAYNE
(mutters)
Was getting' bored, anyhow.

Simon clenches his hand into a fist and edges forward.

Kaylee steps forward, and grabs Simon's hand, unrolls the fist, and intertwines his open hand with hers.

Zoe reaches the cargo bay floor.

ZOE
Kaylee, you're needed in the engine room.

KAYLEE
Ain't nothin' wrong with the engine. It's just—

ZOE
All the jerkin' says otherwise. Look into it.

Kaylee nods reluctantly. She turns to Simon, then lets go of his hand, heading for the stairs. River heads for the stairs as well.

INT. SERENITY – SHUTTLE ONE

The interior of the shuttle is barren. The only sign that anyone once lived there is a simple, modest sized CHEST. Everything is covered with a thin layer of dust, made visible by the soft light pouring in from the open hatch.

Mal slowly opens the chest. There is a sense of routine in his actions. He's opened this chest before. Several times.

The chest holds nothing especially remarkable. Sundries, saris, and shoes – lighter items – are on the top, heavier items hidden underneath.

Mal pushes the clothing aside to reveal a small, expensive looking GLASS BOTTLE.

Mal picks up the bottle, opens it, and takes a tentative sniff. His eyes closed, features relaxing, then—

RIVER (OS)
Your morning coffee.

She leans in the door, not quite entering. Mal looks at the bottle almost guiltily. Sighs, recaps it.

MAL
I was just... She forgot this stuff.

RIVER

She didn't forget.

MAL

Yet she managed to leave it here twice.

RIVER

She never used it much.

MAL

Huh. Makes sense she left it then. You know, she never wore it for her fancy folk, just when she was stuck vesselside with us <brutes>. I remember this one time—

RIVER

It was her favorite.

Mal processes that statement. Then, he shakes his head.

Beat.

River steps inside the shuttle.

RIVER

Do you have a plan?

MAL

Huh?

RIVER

("duh")
For telling Simon.

MAL

Told you not to worry on that.

Beat. They look at each other for a moment.

MAL (cont'd)

So, you understand your part in all this, little one?

RIVER

Do you?

She waits for him to answer.

MAL

This is what I do, darlin'.

She gives him a look – “uh-huh” – and leaves the room. Mal watches her go.

MAL (cont'd)
(weary)
This is what I do...

Act One

INT. BENA - COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE – INARA’S ROOM

The room is sparsely luscious – not as opulent as her shuttle where she entertained, but still beautifully furnished and draped. A lace curtain hangs in front of the light, casting its pattern in shadow over everything, including INARA SERRA, who is lying on the bed, on her side, fast asleep.

Rapid eye movement. She twists, and turns – writhing in apparent discomfort.

Angst on her face. Then a tear: She’s having a nightmare.

Suddenly – she’s awake. Eyes wide open. Rapid breathing.

CLOSE UP: Inara - as anguish washes over her face and the sounds of the world fade around her. Her breathing quickens...

ATHERTON WING (VO, echo)
"Whatever you wish, my dear. And please... Do fight."

The world rushes back.

Inara takes one breath, then another. She pushes herself into a sitting position. Breathes. Then she stands, wrapping her arms across her chest. Breathes.

INT. BENA - COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE – KITCHEN

Even the training house’s kitchen is luxurious - a spacious room painted in soft, blue hues, accented with silver garnishes and marble countertops. Decor aside, the kitchen is not dissimilar from Serenity’s. Rows of exquisitely painted cabinets line the wall; every girl has a cabinet of her own, labeled.

In the center of the room is a large ISLAND, used for meal preparation. Standing at the island is a tall MAN, handsome, mid-30s, with soft eyes. He prepares a platter of assorted fruits, a bottle of champagne on ice resting beside it.

As Inara enters, he looks up from his preparation and smiles politely.

MAN
<Greetings, gracious lady>.

INARA
<Greetings to you, as well>. You're up late?

MAN
As are you. Is it odd to be awake so late when one is
graced by the presence of a Companion?

Inara walks to her locker, opens it, and pulls out a package of tea leaves.

The man resumes preparing his fruit as she puts a kettle on the stove to boil.

INARA
I suppose not. It means the Companion is succeeding in
her duties.

(beat)
You're seeing Sheydra, I presume.

MAN
You presume correctly. May I inquire as to how?

INARA
How I knew?
(shrug)
Clients typically aren't serviced at the Training Houses. All
visits must be approved by the House Mistress – who
almost never approves of such visits...
(smiles)
Unless, of course, said visitor is seeing the House Mistress
herself.

MAN
Sheydra is a woman of singular grace. And you are as
insightful as you are beautiful.

INARA
(blushes)
<Thank you>. Remarkably kind of you to say, considering
the dark rings around my eyes.

MAN
(smiling, points to Inara's mused
hair)
And 'bed-head.'

INARA
(laughs lightly)
Of course. How could I forget?

Inara and the stranger share the moment, then it passes, and they go back to their preparations.

MAN
You didn't mention your name.

INARA
I know.

MAN
Are all Companions this secretive?

INARA
(smiles again)
Only those with 'bed-head.'
(beat)
It's Inara. Inara Serra. And yours?

MAN
I'm Jude. Pleased to meet you, Inara.
(beat)
Inara is very fitting. It means light, correct? And you do have a glow about you, a quality of brightness...

INARA
A smile made of sunlight?

She freezes again, surprised by her own words. Jude stops his cutting and looks up.

JUDE
Are you all right, Inara?

The kettle suddenly hisses steam, startling her.

INARA
Yes – yes, I'm fine.
(beat)
I had a nightmare...

She begins to pour her tea.

JUDE
There's no shame in being troubled. As one of our wiser forefathers once said, "We shall draw from the heart of suffering itself the means of inspiration and survival."

INARA
Winston Churchill.
(another smile)
I prefer, "Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak;
courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen."

JUDE
(impressed)
A memorable quote indeed. I do admire Churchill. A man
of honor, of eloquence... but most of all, he was unafraid.
"It's not enough, that we do our best; sometimes we
have to do what's required." His... certainty, his resolve...

Inara smiles. Jude washes his knife.

JUDE (cont'd)
Resolve, Inara Serra, is the quality that makes a man... or
a woman, for that matter, shine. Whatever pain you're
carrying, I have every confidence that a woman of your
grace will find a path through it soon enough.

He gives her a small bow. She curtsies in kind.

Then he takes his tray and bottle and leaves. Inara takes a sip of her tea, watching
him go.

INARA
(to herself)
You make it sound so simple...

INT. SERENITY – DINING ROOM

A clear acetate MAP spreads across the dining room table in a flurry. A hand
touches the map, which shifts diagrams at the touch.

MAL (VO)
Simple security payroll theft, nothin' fancy.

Mal stands, mug in hand, before the map. Zoe and Wash sit beside him. As the
three examine it, Jayne walks in. He looks at Mal, and then heads for the cabinets.

ZOE
Is that the same definition of 'simple' as 'simple Earth-
that-Was artifact heist?'

MAL
It is.

WASH
And 'simple beef run?'

MAL
I believe so.

JAYNE
(from the cabinets)
What's simple?

WASH
(holding back)
Nah, too easy...

Jayne pops his head between Wash and Zoe's, eyeing the map.

JAYNE
Our new venture of fame 'n fortune?

MAL
Notion is for as little fame an' as much fortune as possible.

ZOE
(points)
This the trade station?

MAL
Fanty promises a walk-in safe big enough to house his mother.

ZOE
Mother? I hear tell those snakes were hatched.

Jayne unwraps a FRUITY-OATY BAR and glances at the map.

JAYNE
Ain't nothin' on this moon that equals the worth of a turd.
Whose loot we snatchin'?

MAL
(grinning)
Well that is the best part.

JAYNE
(‘lightbulb’ moment)
Alliance!? You gone dumb enough to swipe from the hand that smacks you!?

MAL

I have.

JAYNE

(around a mouthful of Fruity-Oaty Bar)
This is the big-ol'-grand Alliance, Mal, not some corner store—

MAL

<Elephant's ass crack>! Jayne! You think it's your job to worry on this?

JAYNE

I just want things goin' smooth.

WASH

Well, never fear! Captain Jayne is on the case. I feel much better. Zoe, do you feel better?

ZOE

Wash...

MAL

Big as the Alliance gets, the 'Verse'll always be bigger. They don't have the manpower to "enforce the peace" on every outer-rim planet. They hire out to private firms, who will not get paid in credit. They get paid in cashy money, which once a month rests here.

He points to the trade station on the map.

JAYNE

Don't that lead back to the "big-ol'-smack-your-ass-Alliance", anyhow?

ZOE

No private firm would ever report the theft of their own payroll. They'd appear weak, might lose their contract.

MAL

No trail. We're as ghosts in this. Won't but rattle the floor.

JAYNE

(grinning)
I can bring some grenades t'help with that!

EVERYBODY

NO!

JAYNE

Well, ain't exactly been a smooth ride, last few months.
S'like the devil's got us in his sights.

MAL

Job'll go smooth. We got an angel watchin' over us.

JAYNE

An angel?

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY/Common Area – SAME TIME

River sits outside the infirmary door, eyes closed.

MAL (VO)

Well... close enough.

She's concentrating on something, and her eyebrows lift as—

KAYLEE (OS, muffled)

Is – is it bad?

INSIDE the infirmary, Kaylee winces as Simon gently probes her reddened and swollen fingers with his gloved hands.

SIMON

You did cook them pretty well, but when it comes to burns—

(Simon dabs Kaylee's hand, as she winces)

—I'm a miracle worker. They'll heal just fine.

KAYLEE

Serves me right for ignorin' Serenity when she's cryin' for me, huh?

SIMON

What? No. Kaylee, it was just a – a stupid mistake. Not that – You're not stupid. It's... I... What I mean to say is... You didn't deserve this. You do so much around here, it's—

(beat, eye contact)

Thank you.

OUTSIDE the infirmary, River smiles.

KAYLEE (OS, muffled)

Thank you?

River's smile broadens.

INSIDE, Simon grabs an OINTMENT and some GAUZE and begins to wrap Kaylee's fingers.

SIMON

For earlier. With Jayne. Thank you for not letting me punch him. If I had, well, I think your fingers are faring much better than my face would have.

(off Kaylee's smile)

But... but more than that... Ever since my sister and I set foot on board Serenity, you've looked out for us. I wouldn't have made it without you...

(grins)

You're like a big sister to both of us.

Long awkward beat.

KAYLEE

...Sister?

SIMON

No, what I meant was— Well, just thank you. For everything.

KAYLEE

You're welcome Simon.

(beat)

I know I said it 'fore, an' I'll say it again, most like, but... it does get awful lonely in the black, 'specially these last few months. Don't think I'da made it without you here, either.

She moves her injured hand to his face, hand on his cheek.

SIMON

(awkwardly close)

Well, I did save your life.

KAYLEE

(closer)

Ain't what I meant.

OUTSIDE, River squirms with delight, until—

She looks up and frowns, as a SHADOW looms over her.

RIVER

You still don't have a plan.

INSIDE, Kaylee and Simon close for a kiss—

MAL (OS)
Hope I'm not intruding?

Simon practically jumps away from Kaylee.

KAYLEE
As a matter of fact, Cap'n...

SIMON
(sarcastic)
No, not at all. Is there anything I can bandage for you?

MAL
Not yet. Just wanted to come get my innoc 'fore we go...
(beat)
And make sure you gave River hers, too.

SIMON
River? What do you—?
(realizing)
No. No, no, no. You're not taking her.

KAYLEE
Taking her...?

SIMON
She's not going with you, and that's final.

MAL
I hear the words "that's final" come out of your mouth
ever again, they truly will be.

KAYLEE
(to Simon)
Oh... it ain't all bad. Lil' bit of excitement could be good
for River. We all been cooped up on this boat so long—

SIMON
Kaylee, you have no idea what you're talking about.

Kaylee's face falls. Without another word, she turns and walks away.

SIMON (cont'd)
Kaylee, wait, I...

Mal watches Kaylee go.

MAL
Ever the ladies' man, I see.

SIMON
Captain, I won't let you take—

MAL
Let? This boat is my home. Y'all are guests on it.

SIMON
Guests!? I've earned my passage, captain—

MAL
And it's time your sister learned from your fine example.

SIMON
I've earned my passage treating bullet holes, knife wounds, laser burns...

Mal wanders around the infirmary, touching things, putting them slightly out of order.

MAL
Some jobs are more interesting than others.

SIMON
I had to reattach your EAR!

Simon follows him, straightening up, increasingly annoyed.

MAL
(smirks)
Yeah. That was...
(not smirking)
...so painful...

SIMON
And you want to put my sister in the middle of that?

MAL
Didn't say 'want.' Said 'will.' It's one job, doctor. She'll be fine.

SIMON
She's a seventeen-year-old girl. A mentally traumatized seven—

MAL

She's a reader. Sees into the truth of things; might see trouble before its coming, which is of use to me.

SIMON

And that's your guiding star, isn't it? 'What's of use'... Do you understand what I've gone through to keep River away from the Alliance?

MAL

I do, and it's a fact we here have been courteous enough to keep to our own selves.

Simon takes an angry step forward.

SIMON

Are you threatening to—

MAL

I look out for me and mine. That's don't include you 'less I conjure it does.

(beat)

This job goes south, doctor, there well may not be another. So here is us, on the raggedy edge. Don't push me, and I won't push you.

Simon looks as if he is about to say something but—

MAL (cont'd)

Not sayin' they will, but things get thick down there, I will keep her from the fray. But she's comin'. Now that's final. *Dong luh ma?*

Angry, beat, then Mal walks out of the infirmary.

Simon stands fuming.

CLOSE-IN on Simon's hand as it curls into a fist.

Act Two

INT. SERENITY – SIMON'S ROOM – LATER

Simon sits on his bed, hunched over a WAVE.

SIMON

...and I couldn't do it. I couldn't hit him. I wanted to, and he deserved it...

INARA (via Wave)

Mal always deserves it.

SIMON

...but I just couldn't.

INARA (via Wave)

Simon, this isn't something to be disappointed about. You maintained control—

SIMON

Funny, the part where he decided he was going to take my sister on a dangerous heist without my permission didn't feel much like control.

INARA (via Wave)

Simon...

Inara smiles at him. Simon returns it wearily, then turns away. Inara sighs.

INARA (via Wave)

You maintained control over yourself in a difficult and stressful circumstance. That's something Mal, certainly to my knowledge, has never done. You should be proud of yourself.

SIMON

I failed to take a swing at a <son of a bitch> who deserved it. I'm so proud.

(beat)

I wish you were here. You could talk to him. You could change his mind.

Inara's features instantly darken.

INARA (via Wave)

No. I couldn't.

(sighs)

He'll take care of her, you know. Mal... He can be crude and inconsiderate, but he isn't a cruel man. He won't let any harm come to River. She'll be safe.

SIMON

I wish I could share in your confidence... He hasn't been the same since you've left for Bena.

INARA (via Wave)
So you keep telling me.

SIMON
It's true. He's been—

INARA (via Wave)
(rushed)
Please. I don't want to know how he's been. I...
(smiles)
There are some things about a person that don't change.
However pigheaded Mal's been acting lately, he... he's a
good man, underneath. He'll take care of her.

SIMON
I... I just hope you're right.

INT. BENA - COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE – INARA'S BEDROOM

The Wave disconnects. Inara sits on her bed, looking lost.

INARA
Me, too...

FEMALE VOICE (OS)
More conversations with your past, Inara?

Inara turns, visibly startled. SHEYDRA, an elegant Companion in her 40s, steps inside.

INARA
Sheydra, I... didn't see you there.

SHEYDRA
I don't blame you. It sounds like you were busy.

INARA
That was my doctor, Simon.

SHEYDRA
Simon? I recognize that name. He's the one who called
during your recent absence, correct?

Inara tenses at the word "absence," but smiles through it.

INARA
Yes. He did.
(beat)

Pardon me for being rude, but aren't you with a client?

SHEYDRA

Jude had to take an urgent business Wave. I thought I'd come see you in the meantime. He told me that you met in the kitchen. I think he has his eye on you.

INARA

(flustered)

I see. That's certainly... It's news... Sheydra, I didn't mean to attract his attention. We merely...

Sheydra holds up her hand.

SHEYDRA

No need to sound defensive, Inara. He takes pleasure in you. I'm glad of it. Jude's a good man. Caring. Intelligent. The ideal client, I think, for a young Companion to take on after a significant dry spell.

INARA

(sweetly surprised)

Jude wants to contract me?

SHEYDRA

Well, he didn't say it in so many words, but a Companion has a way of knowing these things.

They share a smile. Inara's doesn't quite reach her eyes.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY

Kaylee stands on the catwalk, looking down at the crew as they finish prep. Zoe walks up half the stairs.

ZOE

Landing in ten. Does the mule need a spanking?

KAYLEE

(half-hearted)

Mule's fine.

Zoe nods. She hesitates then adds –

ZOE

How 'bout Serenity? Did we know what this morning's trouble was?

KAYLEE

She's fine. A little jittery, is all. Nothing's broken. She just... she just hurts.

ZOE

(not convinced; eyeing Kaylee's fingers)
She 'hurts?'

KAYLEE

Everybody thinks a ship is just a ship. Parts wired together, but Serenity ain't that. She's much more'n that. An' everybody feelin' so lousy... she hurts.

Zoe sighs, not without sympathy.

ZOE

Come on down. Give the mule a final check-up 'fore we go, *hao* <all right>?

Kaylee smiles. Barely.

KAYLEE

Shiny.

She heads down the stairs. As she goes our focus switches to –

The chains, hoisted back up into the ceiling of the ship. The mule floats just above the floor. Jayne throws some extra clips in the container next to River, who is sitting in the back. Everybody is moving and talking at once.

Simon hands River her boots, which she promptly hands back to him.

Mal turns to Kaylee, who's just stepped onto the bay floor, as Zoe rushes past them.

MAL

You get Serenity prepped, Kaylee. Apt to be going a mite faster'n we were coming.

KAYLEE

I do know the drill <my beloved captain>. We'll patch her together if you PROMISE we can use some of our illgots to buy parts. NEW parts.

Jayne dumps about eight different automatic firearms and related clips on the hover-mule.

ZOE
(to Jayne)
You're gonna have to choose. We can't take all this weight, not if the haul's half what we hope.

He tosses five or so of the smaller guns to Kaylee.

JAYNE
I'll just take these then. They make the best impression.

SIMON
Now, River, you stay behind the others. If there's fighting you drop to the floor or run away.
(beat)
It's okay to leave them to die.

River awkwardly puts on the huge pair of goggles, looks at her brother.

RIVER
I'm the brains of the operation.

ZOE (into com)
(climbing into the mule)
Can you hear us, baby?

WASH (OS, via com)
You're in my head like a great idea. Come back safe.

ZOE
(into com)
Always do.
(to the crew)
We should hit town right during Sunday worship. Won't be any crowds.

MAL
(hopping onto the mule)
If Fanty and Mingo are right about the payroll, this could be a sunny day for us.

SIMON
(approaching)
Captain, I'll ask you one last time...

MAL
Kinda figured you would. Listen, I'm taking your sister under my protection here. If anything happens to her, anything at all, I swear to you I will get very choked up... Honestly, there could be tears.

He peels out, leaves Simon fuming in the exhaust trail – and realizing he’s still holding River’s boots.

EXT. LILAC – DESERT – DAY – SAME TIME

The ship, and smoldering Simon, dwindle in the distance as the craft glides along the desert terrain of Lilac.

ZOE

Why do you do that? This is a milk run. You just make him worry more.

MAL

I don’t know. Something about that boy just makes you want to poke him.

Jayne, in the back with River, lets out a big-throated war-whoop.

JAYNE

YEAHH!! Crime and violence! `Bout damn time we had ourselves a less’n honest job. This is gonna be all kinds of fun.

MAL

It’s a job, Jayne. You follow orders and keep your head. We’re gonna run this one simple and sweet, remember?

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – SAME TIME

Simon watches the hover-mule go. Kaylee sidles up to him...

KAYLEE

Don’t mind the captain none, Simon. I know he’ll look out for her.

SIMON

It’s amazing. I bring River all the way out to the raggedy edge of the `Verse so she can hide from the Alliance by robbing banks.

KAYLEE

It’s just a little trading station. They’ll be back before you can spit— not that you spit...

She turns to Simon, but he isn’t listening. He paces, tense and angry,

SIMON
(muttering)
<An endless hell of snakes and vomit>.
(louder)
I should have gotten her off this boat months ago.

KAYLEE
But you didn't.

SIMON
No.

KAYLEE
You conjure there might be some reason y'ain't left yet?

He looks into her eyes.

SIMON
There's a reason.
(beat)
I'm a moron.

He stalks off. She watches him go, crestfallen.

KAYLEE
That's a theory I'm comin' round to...

EXT. LILAC – DESERT – SAME TIME

The mule shoots through small gulches, headed for the yet unseen town.

ANGLE: on River as she stares over the side of the mule at the ground beneath them.

ZOE
We can build worlds. We can't build roads?

MAL
Check the map. See how we're doing.

Zoe pulls out the map.

ZOE
What I can't figure out is why they sent us in the first place. We ain't exactly in their good graces.

MAL

Because we're the best. You don't send a skimmer in a top-knot ain't never been out of the city on job like this. You send the pros. That's us.

JAYNE

(leaning forward)

River's touching me. She keeps coming over to my side.

A beat, as Mal tries to maintain his now deflated calm.

The mule comes to the top of a hill with a view – the town – set out like a spoked wheel: Streets radiating in a circle around the center, which is a large church. The place embodies the lives of folk out here: Adobe and wood mix with metal and plastic – whatever's on hand to build with. The only pristine edifice is the church, perfectly round and rising some two stories above the rest of the town.

EXT. LILAC – TRADING STATION – MOMENTS LATER

Right now the streets are mainly empty as the mule pulls up, Zoe hitching it as they speak.

ZOE

(confirming on the map)

This is it. Trading station.

Jayne jumps out of the mule, unzipping his coat to reveal his gun.

JAYNE

Shiny. Let's be bad guys.

Mal gives Jayne a funny look.

MAL

Right.

(to River)

You ready to go to work, darlin'?

RIVER

There's no pattern to the pebbles here, they're completely random. I tried to count them but you drove too fast. Hummingbird.

Zoe shoots Mal a look that says, "Are you sure about bringing her along?"

MAL

Great. Let's go.

INT. LILAC - TRADING STATION – MOMENTS LATER

BOOM! The door slams open and BOOM! Zoe shoots out the CorVue with her sawed-off as Mal and Jayne stride in behind her.

There are maybe fifteen people in the place. It's a combination post-office, general store, bank, and most other things. People are divvied between store workers, farming folk, and a couple of dirt-poor kids.

MAL

Hands and knees and heads bowed down! Everybody now!

Two MEN who appear to be farm folk rush Mal and the others.

Mal draws on the elder one and he stops dead in his tracks.

The other tries to tackle Jayne, which is not necessarily a great idea. Jayne clotheslines him so hard, he spins right upside-down—

Jayne grabs him by the legs and CRACK! – he bounces his head right off the floor, knocking him old cold.

MAL

Y'all wanna be looking very intently at your own belly buttons. I see heads start to rise, violence is gonna ensue.

The guy who rushed Mal complies along with everybody else. Jayne dumps his catch down on the floor and rips open his dirty shirt to reveal a private security uniform.

JAYNE

Looks like this is the place.

He takes a shiny official pin from the guard he's clocked and looks up at Mal, who motions for Zoe to open the front door. She does, and River steps in.

ANGLE: RIVER'S BARE FEET – walking slowly among the hunched-over customers as Mal addresses them.

MAL

You've probably guessed we mean to be thieving here, but what we are after is not yours. So let's have no undue fussin'. You just keep to your knees, take this time to scratch your neck some, maybe think about your loved ones, if anybody loves you.

As he speaks, Jayne scrambles to the back office, finding the small vault locked.

JAYNE

She's locked up.

River suddenly looks around, perturbed. She focuses her attention on each person in turn – stopping on-

CLOSE ON: a YOUNG TOUGH.

River looks at Zoe, alarmed, and silently points to the young man with her eyes.

Zoe looks at her, "are you sure?"

River nods with comical emphasis.

The YOUNG TOUGH – messy hair, early twenties – is slowly reaching for the WEAPON in his belt when he finds Zoe's sawed-off nuzzling his cheek.

ZOE

You know what the definition of a hero is? It's someone who gets other people killed. You can look it up later.

He drops his gun, slides it across the floor.

MAL

(noticing the gun)

One of you has the code to that vault. You might make yourself known at this point...

Nobody moves.

MAL (cont'd)

Okay, there's a couple of things I'd like to make clear. First, we don't wanna hurt anybody. Second, my large friend over hear really does wanna hurt somebody. He kinda craves violence.

JAYNE

It's a flaw in my character.

MAL

It's a little disturbing. So I strongly suggest the trade agent make himself known now, or my boy will pick victims here at random.

JAYNE

(matter-of-fact)

I'd like to mention I also hit women.

MAL

Good point. Let's factor that in. For the last time, one of you has the code...

River has been furrowing her brow, suddenly points to an OLD MAN in front of her.

Mal kneels by the old man...

MAL (cont'd)

And my feminine intuition tells me it's you.

He hauls the fellow up, tosses him roughly towards the vault. Zoe follows, Jayne staying with the populous.

TRADE AGENT

This is a crop moon. Don't think you'll find what you—

MAL

BEE-tzway. Wrong wuomun FAH-TSAI <Shut up and make us wealthy>.

The old man punches in the code. The vault opens slightly.

ANGLE: From inside the vault.

Which is just a tiny, glorified wall safe. We see a couple of bundles of bills, some scattered coin. Really unimpressive. Jayne and Zoe are behind the captain, peering in.

ZOE

At last, we can retire and give up this life of crime.

JAYNE

My urge to do violence is getting' more pronounced.

MAL

If I teach you nothing else in these many years, you will need to grasp the difference between a safe—

Mal reaches in, pulls a lever and the floor opens, a six-foot HOLE appearing, STAIRS leading to a corridor, all gleaming metal and blue light. Zoe smiles. Jayne peers down as Mal addresses the old man.

MAL (cont'd)

—and a vault.

(to the old man)

Is there a guard down there? Be truthful.

OLD MAN
(nodding)
Y'all are Browncoats, hey? Fought for independence?

MAL
War's long done. We're all just folk now.
(calls down)
Listen up! We are coming down to empty that vault.

The Voice of a young GUARD comes up from below.

GUARD (OS)
You have to give me your authorization password!

Jayne impatiently releases a burst of machine-gun fire down into the hole. A beat...

GUARD (OS)
Okay...

Mal looks at Zoe and they head down.

We move in on River as something crosses her face. Worry. Something not right.

EXT. LILAC – TOWN – DAY

A WOMAN carrying a bucket and her nine year old SON are looking at the trading station a few buildings away.

SON
Repeater.

WOMAN
Did sound summat like gun-blast... Maybe you aught run
tell Lawman...

She turns and right by her, in the shadows, is a MAN.

Mostly. He is hideously disfigured, a combination of self-mutilation and bubbling red of radiation poisoning. His clothes are rags, his eyes pinpoints of glazed madness.

A blade blurs toward the woman—

INT. LILAC - TRADING STATION – SAME TIME

River SCREAMS and flops onto her back, pinned by the revelation. Others look at her, concerned, as Jayne makes his way to her.

JAYNE
What the hell is up? You all right? What's goin' on?

RIVER
(whispered, wide-eyed)
Reavers.

Act Three

INT. LILAC – TRADING STATION VAULT – MOMENTS LATER

The inside of the vault is as something off the central planets, all shiny and blue and new. A short corridor leads to a real vault door, which sits open.

Behind that door, a few bags of the real deal; neatly stacked cash, waiting to be robbed.

Zoe hauls out the last of five bags as Mal talks to the GUARD, holding his gun at him.

MAL
Leg's good, it'll bleed plenty and we avoid any necessary organs...

GUARD
I was thinking more of a graze.

MAL
Well, you don't want it to look like you just gave up...

GUARD
No, I get that.

JAYNE (OS)
MAL!

MAL
(angry, to himself)
Every heist, he's gotta start yelling my name—

JAYNE
(barreling in)
Mal! Reavers! The girl's pitchin' a fit. I bet they're here or they're comin' soon!

He is already loading up with the bags as Mal thinks quickly.

MAL
(to Zoe and Jayne)
Get on the mule.
(to the guard, pointing to the vault)
That open from the inside?

GUARD
Whah-ah-yes...

MAL
You get everyone upstairs in there and you seal it. Long
as you got air you don't open it. Understand?

GUARD
I-buh I-

Mal is in his face, dark and huge.

MAL
GET THEM INSIDE THE VAULT!

INT. LILAC - TRADING STATION – SAME TIME

The hostages, now unguarded, are panicking. They have herded themselves into clusters.

One WOMAN is trying to shepherd her crying children under her cloak. They barely pay her mind as they stare at River.

THREE MEN are breaking a wooden shelf, trying to make weapons.

A pre-teen BOY swallows hard, face pale, as he looks toward the door.

The Young Tough, however, looks unconvinced. He shakes his head, makes a dash for the door and opens it – barely managing to close it as SOMETHING lunges for him.

Some of the hostages scream.

The Young Tough stands there, back to the door, panting.

In the middle of it all is River, still on the floor. Her eyes are wide open. Her body spasms. Her face is contorted in pain.

EXT. LILAC – CENTER OF TOWN – SAME TIME

A FOOT, with metal hooks sticking out of the heel-like claws, drops right in front of the frame, and the Reaver starts running toward the church as well.

ANGLE: As a woman is dragged screaming inside a dark doorway.

ANGLE: A man comes out of his house with a rifle – and a female Reaver dives at him with impossible speed, tackling him.

INT. LILAC – ST. CECILIA’S CHURCH – SAME TIME

All FLASHES and FAST CUTS:

Three CHILDREN scamper underneath a pew in the center aisle of the church as the rest of the CONGREGATION stampedes between the pews, all of them screaming and shouting – a frantic mixture of CURSING and PRAYING, no BARGAINING – as REAVERS, monstrous, ugly, never seen full-on, hunt them down one by one while MORE REAVERS block the exits of the chapel.

Two REAVERS grab a pair of SOBBING teen SISTERS and SLAM them down onto adjacent pews, tearing at their floral skirts, and bending over them...

Another REAVER grabs a middle-aged MAN by the wrist, twisting it. There is a loud POP and the man cries out as he falls to his knees. The Reaver takes out his KNIFE. The man SCREAMS.

A Reaver is about to CUT a young woman’s face from EAR to EAR as she sobs. He throws her to the floor and begins to cut himself instead. Then, in a pleasurable rage, turns his attention back to her and slams the knife down again and again.

An OLDER MAN walks around in shock, cupping the stump of his arm – which has been cut off just above the elbow. He trips, falls to the floor. His face contorts in horror when he sees he’s tripped over a WOMAN’S BODY.

A young SHEPHERD grabs a candle from the ALTAR and throws it at an oncoming REAVER, striking it in the EYE. The Reavers HISSES and speeds up in its charge, tackling the young shepherd to the ground. The Reaver holds the shepherd down with one massive arm. He hooks his claw-like finger at the Shepherd’s wide EYE. The Shepherd SCREAMS.

But the scream is cut short as all SOUND AND COLOR DRAINS from the room and the REAVERS turn into wide-eyed, tight-lipped RIVERS, that are the only color in the scene, reddish tears against the drab gray:

RIVER TAM holds the Shepherd’s eyeball in her hand.

A RIVER behind her opens her mouth to bite at the face of a trembling woman.

Two more RIVERS are restraining a struggling man while a third RIVER sets a sharp metal bar in place on the first of his two shoulder blades. The third RIVER thrusts the bar forward...

An OLD WOMAN kneels, rosary in hand, praying through the madness.

CLOSE-IN on her eerily calm face.

Suddenly, there is sound again, her weary voice...

OLD WOMAN

...Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum,
et vitam venturi saeculi, Ame—

Her prayer is cut short as a RIVER grabs her by the neck, snapping it instantly, and drops her to the floor. River steps forward, grabbing the pew where the CHILDREN are hiding and RIPPING it out of the floor. The children huddle together. They SCREAM – a high pitched wail above all the other shouting and screaming – as the RIVER grabs for the children.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Wash sits calmly at in the pilot's chair, toy dinosaurs in hand. Simon stands behind him, arms crossed over his chest, staring out of the windows anxiously.

WASH

I can't decide if the t-rex or the raptor should attack the stegosaurus. On one hand—

Wash picks up around the raptor.

WASH (cont'd)

(in raptor voice)

I am a quick, scary killer with my speedy reflexes and disemboweling claws, rwarrr!

(normal voice)

But on the other hand...

He puts down the raptor and picks up the t-rex.

WASH (cont'd)

(in t-rex voice)

I am a larger dinosaur and look scarier to the naked eye, mwhahaha! But in truth, I am a slower being and my arms are mostly for show...

(normal voice, to Simon)

What do you think?

Simon looks briefly at the dinosaurs, then turns his attention back to the windows.
No answer.

WASH (cont'd)
Okay... Raptor it is!
(in raptor voice)
It's evisceration time!

He puts the dinosaurs in place, then turns to Simon.

WASH
(still in raptor voice)
They're going to—
(cough, normal voice)
going to be okay.

SIMON
It doesn't matter.
(off Wash's confused look)
I mean... of course it matters. I want River to be safe. I
need River to be safe.

WASH
I'm sense a big "but" coming on.

SIMON
But the moment I let Mal take her, the moment I let him
control us, she stopped being safe. It doesn't matter if
she comes back unscathed. I've failed her.

Wash stretches, puts his feet up on the console.

WASH
I can't wait for the day she starts dating. It's gonna be a
hoot.

SIMON
D-dating?
(beat)
I called Inara. She promised me that Mal would take care
of her, said that underneath it all he's a good man. He'll
protect her.

WASH
Well, there you have it. Inara's a great judge of
character. At least, that's what's written on her card.

SIMON
I just hope she's right...

INT. LILAC - TRADING STATION – SAME TIME

River continues to spasm on the floor.

EXT. LILAC – CENTER OF TOWN – SAME TIME

The man STRUGGLES as the female Reaver claws at his face. BLOOD pours down onto the dirt at his feet like tears. The man tries to reach for his rifle, but it's just out of reach. A second Reaver appears and grabs the man's flailing arm, pulling at it. There is a loud CRACK as the arm BREAKS.

CLOSE ON the man's mouth as he screams – but the scream is cut off, the world goes silent and gray.

We pull out and see that it is RIVER who screams, silent and colorless, dressed in the man's clothes, face bleeding, as the red Reavers play tug-of-war with her body.

The first Reaver lets go suddenly, and River is swung around as the second Reaver drags her across the street by her broken arm and SLAMS her into an umbrella stand.

She lands with a sickening THUMP and crumples to the ground.

Behind the umbrella stand, a female Reaver is holding another RIVER, now wearing a homespun dress, one hand wrapped around River's squirming body, the other hand covering River's nose and mouth, choking her.

Not far away is another River, wearing an aging suit, already dead, her chest covered in blood, eyes open and glassy, a Reaver dragging her by the hair.

Two more Reavers are holding a small River dressed in a sunflower dress, holding a rag doll. She shakes and cries as the Reavers use their fingernails to cut slices of her flesh and slowly peel the skin back—

INT. LILAC - TRADING STATION – SAME TIME

Zoe and Jayne BURST out of the vault, startling the hostages.

ZOE

Inside the vault! Everyone, inside the vault!

She tosses Jayne her bag of coin and cash and grabs the shoulders of the nearest bystander, pushing her toward the vault stairs.

MAN

We'll be like sitting ducks in there!

MAL (OS)
Better sitting than dying. Everybody, inside the vault!

He emerges from the vault stairs and immediately begins to help Zoe usher people down the stairs, many against their will.

Jayne crosses the room and kneels beside River, who is still lying on the floor, eyes wide, body twitching. She stops twitching for only a second—

RIVER
(harsh whisper)
...It's... the Pax...

—then continues with the twitching.

JAYNE
She's still actin' crazy.

MAL
(shouting)
Well, snap her out of it!

JAYNE
How?

Mal and Zoe drag an old, shell-shocked woman to her feet and lead her to the vault.

MAL
I don't know! Pinch her! Recite an epic poem! I don't care how you do it, Jayne, just get it done!

Jayne reaches out a hesitant hand and begins to tap River's forehead.

JAYNE
Hey! Hey, girl! You in there?

River doesn't react. Jayne taps with more intensity.

JAYNE (cont'd)
Come on, now, girl! Time for us to bugout!

Still no reaction.

Jayne hauls back and SLAPS her hard across the cheek.

River's body jerks. For a moment she's frozen, then she pushes herself onto her elbows and begins looking around wildly.

RIVER
(crying)
The pebbles... <they're covered in blood>... IN BLOOD!

Jayne stands and pulls her to her feet, then dashes across the room, heading for the money.

Across the room, Zoe and Mal continue to drag people into the vault. Mal pushes a protesting man down the stairs.

MAL
Now, wait in the vault like I say, you won't have to take them on at all! Reavers'll be long gone by the time you open that door.

FRIGHTENED WOMAN
But what if they're still there?

YOUNG BOY
My uncle says they'll eat us!

Mal and Zoe share a look as Zoe leads a pregnant woman down the stairs. Mal turns to the boy.

MAL
Your uncle's right. Everyone hear that? His uncle's right! Reavers'll eat you, and then they'll do a whole lot more. But they ain't bright creatures, and they sure as hell ain't patient. You get in the vault, you hide, an' they won't bother to find you.

And then the last of them are inside.

Mal and Zoe close the vault, then run across the room.

MAL
(to Jayne)
You got the cash?

Jayne holds it up.

MAL (cont'd)
Good. Let's go.

Zoe is the first one to the door, her gun raised, followed by Jayne who holds the money bags to his body. Mal grabs River by the hand, and they follow, his other hand holding his gun.

INT./EXT. LILAC - TRADING STATION - CONTINUOUS

The doors burst open, Jayne and Zoe coming out first.

MAL
Zoe, take the wheel!

JAYNE
You see 'em? Anybody see 'em?

Jayne and Zoe make it onto the hover-mule first. They throw the bags onto the back of the hover-mule.

River and Mal trail just behind, Mal practically dragging her. She is freaked, in her own space.

A Reaver comes out of nowhere, and grabs River by the neck, pulling her away from Mal. She screams. Mal's hand is on his gun instantly.

His gun touches Reaver-flesh – and BAM! A point blank shot between the eyes.

Mal grabs River's hand once more, and they dash for the mule.

He scans the area as he hands River up to Jayne's care before climbing on himself.

As the craft powers up, slowly moving, the Young Tough bursts out of the station, grabbing the back of the mule.

YOUNG TOUGH
Take me with you!

MAL
Get in the vault with the others—

YOUNG TOUGH
I can't stay here! Please!

MAL
It's too many. Drive, Zoe.

A Reaver craft ROARS over their heads. It's nearly the size of Serenity. Torn apart, belching smoke – a welded conglomeration of ruined ships, painted for war. Predator, pure.

It disappears over the rooftops.

YOUNG TOUGH
PLEASE!

MAL
DRIVE!

Zoe's face is set with unhappy determination as floors it. The mule shoots out.

The young man continues to hang on to the rear until Mal pries his fingers loose, leaving him lying in the dust.

As they move from him, four Reavers jump out of the shadows and grab the young man. Mal unhesitatingly draws his gun. He nudges the lever with his thumb and the cartridge pops back.

Mal fires twice. The young man takes both bullets to the chest, slumps down dead.


EXT. LILAC – EDGE OF TOWN – DAY

As the Mule shoots past the last building, a REAVER SKIFF – bigger than the hover-mule, and as armored and predatory as the ships – shoots out from behind the buildings of the adjacent street, right abreast of our gang.

ZOE
They're following us!

Mal looks over his shoulder, disbelieving.

MAL
<Hell on toast>!



Act Four

EXT. LILAC – DESERT

The mule and the skiff shoot through the rocky terrain.

The skiff swings closer, about to ram to hover-mule.

MAL
(to Zoe)
Faster! Faster! Faster would be better!

Jayne peppers the skiff with automatic spray from Vera, and it swings away. There is sporadic return fire.

JAYNE
How come they ain't blowing us out of the air?

MAL

They wanna run us down. The up-close kill.

River is squashed down on her back, being very small.

RIVER

They want us alive when they eat us.

Mal and Jayne return fire – which bounces ineffectively off the skiff's hull.

JAYNE

Boy, sure would be nice if we had some grenades,
don'tcha think?

Mal responds by upping his firing rate.

ZOE (into com)

Wash, baby can you hear me?

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – CONTINUOUS

Wash, now alone, is in a frenzy of switch flipping, preparing for take-off.

WASH (into com)

We're moments from air. You got somebody behind you?

We intercut Wash and Zoe at this point:

EXT. LILAC - DESERT – CONTINUOUS

ZOE

Reavers.

WASH

Ai-yah. Tyen-ah...

ZOE

We're not gonna reach you in time.

WASH

Just keep moving, honey...

EXT. SERENITY – CONTINUOUS

As she lifts off and starts heading toward the others.

WASH (cont'd, VO)
We're coming to you.

EXT. LILAC - DESERT – CONTINUOUS

The Mule rockets over the frame followed hard upon by the skiff.

Jayne's gun stops firing. He leans back to open one of the hover-mule's ammo containers when—

A short arrow pins the ammo container shut.

Jayne tries to pry it loose, stands to get leverage—

A harpoon THWINNGS through the air from the skiff and SHHNNK! goes through Jayne's leg. The harpoon grips the leg and pulls—

Jayne goes flying off the back of the mule, Mal just grabbing him as the harpoon line reels slowly tighter—

MAL
Grab on!

Jayne grabs the mule, legs dangling, pulled out between the two vessels as Mal slams a new cartridge into his pistol.

JAYNE
I won't get et! You shoot me if they take me!

Mal steadies himself and takes aim, seemingly at Jayne—

JAYNE (cont'd)
Well, don't shoot me first!

Mal fires. Again. Steadies himself for one more...

The line holding the harpoon is split by Mal's third shot.

The Mule surges forward as Jayne drags on the ground. Mal hauls him in as River bounds into the front to make room.

JAYNE
Rutting pigs! Where's—

And River is holding out his weapon for him before he can ever ask.

EXT. LILAC - ANOTHER PART OF THE DESERT – SAME TIME

Serenity rushes across the desert floor, not much higher off than the small crafts.

INT. SERENITY - BRIDGE

Wash is at the controls. He's calm, all business.

WASH
How's she handling, baby?

ZOE (via com)
Wish you were here.

WASH
Get some distance on 'em. You come to the flats. I want you to swing round. Gonna try a Barn Swallow.

Wash hits the internal com.

WASH (cont'd, into com)
Simon! Open her up!

INT. SERENITY - CARGO BAY – SAME TIME

Simon is next to the cargo bay's airlock doors as they pull open, and the ramp beyond them opens down, letting in a rush of wind and light.

EXT. LILAC - DESERT – SAME TIME

The hover-mule is tightly squeezed, racing through a rocky canyon. Zoe sees the flats ahead.

MAL
(points)
Those rocks, give 'em a taste.

She sideswipes some rocks, breaking them loose.

The rocks bounce at the skiff and hit an engine, forcing it to veer behind the rise.

EXT. LILAC - DESERT FLATS – CONTINUOUS

The hover-mule reaches the flats, away from the rocks.

WASH (via com)
Okay, we've talked this through...

ZOE
Talkin' ain't doin'.

The skiff reappears, far behind but coming fast.

Zoe throws the wheel and the mule comes hard about, fishtailing slightly as it whirls to face the oncoming skiff.

WASH (via com)
Don't slow down!

Angle: THE SKIFF

As it heads for the mule—

ANGLE: THE MULE

As it heads for the skiff—

—and Serenity swoops down out of the sky, bay doors open, and comes right up behind it—

—The hover-mule is SWALLOWED by the bigger ship, scooped up through the cargo bay doors—

INT. SERENITY - CARGO BAY – CONTINUOUS

—And only its forward momentum keeps it from being squashed as it flies backwards into the bay, narrowly missing Simon and smashing back into the staircase, sparks and people flying—

EXT. LILAC - DESERT – CONTINUOUS

Serenity tries to get altitude – but slams right into the oncoming skiff, tearing it apart—

INT. SERENITY - CARGO BAY – CONTINUOUS

A flaming portion of the top flies in, skids to the floor as small fires erupt from the mule as well.

Simon pulls a lever and jets of CO₂ shoot out of the floor.

Simon hits a button to start the outer ramp closing, then runs to the mule. The CO₂ stops and he finds River sitting in her seat, completely unharmed. Zoe is climbing painfully out of the other seat, Mal and Jayne have both been thrown.

SIMON

River?

RIVER

(profound surprise)

I swallowed a bug.

Kaylee runs in to see how everyone is. She goes to Simon.

KAYLEE

Are you okay?

MAL

Is he okay!?

A bloodied Reaver POPS up from under the skiff-top.

He lunges for Mal, baring sharpened teeth—

Mal spins and draws, fires into his belly as Jayne and Zoe both fire at the same time.

The freak takes too long to go down, but down he goes. Dies sitting against the skiff top.

Everybody takes a moment to look at each other.

WASH (via com)

We all here? What's going on?

INT. SERENITY - BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Wash sits all alone.

WASH (cont'd, into com)

Hello?

INT. SERENITY - CARGO BAY – SAME TIME

ZOE

(moves to com)

No casualties. Anybody following?

WASH (via com)
Nice flying, baby. That's a negative. Clean getaway. Out of atmo in six minutes.

MAL
Set course for Beaumonde.
(to the others)
First thing, I want this bod—

Simon suddenly PUNCHES him in the face, causing Mal to stumble back, and Simon to shake his fist in pain.

MAL
Nee TZAO ss-MA!? Nee-YOW wuh-KAI CHANG? <You wanna bullet!? You wanna bullet right in your throat!?!>

SIMON
You stupid, selfish son of a whore—

MAL
I'm a hair's-breadth away from riddling you with holes, Doctor—

SIMON
"One simple job! She'll be fine!"

MAL
She IS fine! Except for bein' still crazy, she's the picture of health!

Off to the side, Jayne opens his FLASK. He pours some liquor on the wound...

ZOE
Wasn't for River, we'd probably be left there.

...then takes a healthy sip of it himself.

Zoe (cont'd)
She felt 'em coming.

SIMON
Never again. You understand me?

MAL
Seems I remember a talk about you giving me orders on my boat.

SIMON

Well we're off your boat... Just as soon as River gets her share of the "bounty."

KAYLEE

Let's not do anything hasty...

MAL

No, shiny! I'm sick a' carrying tourists anyhow. Soon's we hit Beaumonde you can pick up your earnings and be on your merry. Meantime you do your job. Patch up my crew.

A beat.

RIVER

He didn't lie down... They never lie down.

She is looking at the Reaver. Everyone does.

INT. BENA - COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE – KITCHEN

Inara is at the sink, rinsing out her tea cup. As she finishes, Jude steps into the room carrying the fruit dish and two wine glasses. Inara smiles.

INARA

Let me take those for you.

JUDE

No, that's all right. No need for you to trouble yourself.

INARA

It's no trouble.

She takes the dishes from his hands and turns back to the sink. Jude picks up a towel, prepared to dry, standing close.

JUDE

That's rather thoughtful of you. Thank you.

She smiles and begins to wash the dishes. He dries her teacup.

JUDE (cont'd)

You wash them yourself.

INARA

Is that so remarkable?

JUDE

Most other Companions, I think, would consider such duties beneath them.

She hands him one of the dishes. He takes it without taking her eyes off her. There's a natural, comfortable cadence to the two of them working together.

INARA

I spent a considerable amount of time working freelance, away from the Houses. The majority of which, I spent renting a shuttle on a transport ship.

JUDE

That sounds quaint.

INARA

(reflective)

It was...

(then rushed)

But the captain was... very annoying and the schedule he kept made working very... sporadic. But... I loved that ship...

(turns to Jude)

Out on the rim, if you don't do the dishes yourself, they don't get done.

The dishes are now all cleaned and dried. She moves to put the dishes back into their cabinet while he re-hangs the towel.

JUDE

One must acquire many stories, traveling on such a ship.

INARA

I've got my share.

JUDE

You should tell me sometime. Perhaps over dinner.

Inara looks into his eyes.

INARA

(blushing)

Are you looking to contract my services, because Sheydra—

JUDE

No.

(beat)

I was asking you to dinner.

INT. SERENITY – ENGINE ROOM – LATER

River sits in front of the engine.

RIVER

Radion-accelerator core. Compression Coil. G-line.
Catalyzer. Parts. With functions. Functional parts.

She lifts her hand, as if she's about to touch the engine, then pulls it back.

RIVER (cont'd)

Fuel goes in. It becomes a process. Mechanical.

She draws her knees to her chest. The engine begins to spin faster, twirling at twice its original speed. River's hair blows back and she closes her eyes, mouth slightly agape as she feels the air on her skin.

The engine begins to spark.

Kaylee rushes into the room, not immediately noticing River.

KAYLEE

Shh...shh... ain't no reason to fuss now, ain't no reason to
– River! What are you doing in here, *mei-mei*?

RIVER

The engine forgot its process.

KAYLEE

It's just cranky. Everyone gets cranky.

River is looking towards the engine, but her eyes are far away.

RIVER

It's a machine.

KAYLEE

Serenity ain't a machine. She's family.

(turning to River)

What are you doin' here? All that excitement – if I was
you, I'd be catchin' forty winks 'bout now.

RIVER

Sleep is traumatic.

KAYLEE

(concerned)

You having nightmares?

RIVER

No. I am getting way too at home around here...

Kaylee sits down, puts her arm around River's shoulder.

KAYLEE

Don't talk like that! In a few hours I'll have words with that brother of yours, talk some sense into him and things'll be right as rain again.

RIVER

I'm not afraid of the storm. I think it should be afraid... of me.

Kaylee smiles, begins to laugh.

For a beat, River looks stunned, but then she begins to laugh too.

INT. SERENITY - FOREDECK HALLWAY

Mal and Zoe enter from the kitchen.

ZOE

No, I think things'll glide a deal smoother for us without River and Simon on board... but how long do you think they'll last?

MAL

Doc made his call. They's as babes in a basket when we took 'em in; we sheltered 'em a plenty. Man has to cut loose, learn to stand on his own.

ZOE

Like that man back in town?

They stop by Mal's bunk.

MAL

I had to shoot him. What the Reavers would have done to him before they killed him...

ZOE

I know. That was piece a' mercy. But before that, him begging us to bring him along...

MAL

We couldn't take the weight. Woulda slowed us down.

ZOE

You know for certain—

MAL

Mule won't run with five. I shoulda dumped the girl? Or you? Or Jayne?

(considering)

Well, Jayne...

ZOE

Coulda tossed the payload.

MAL

Toss the ... Zoe, I got bits falling off my ship, I got a crew ain't been paid, and, oh, yeah, a powerful need to eat sometime this month. We tell Fanty and Mingo we skunked the job, what do you think they'll do to us? We're close to gone out here. We get a job, we gotta make good.

ZOE

Sir, I don't disagree on any particular point, it's just... in time of war, we would've never left a man stranded.

He nods, and begins to head down into his bunk.

MAL

(not looking back)

Maybe that's why we lost.

Zoe, with some sadness, watches him go.

BLACKOUT